

transplanted outside after a glasshouse start, according to geographical situation (Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries, 1932). It is thus difficult to see how this innovation could substantially affect the numbers of *dysodea*, as has been suggested (Heath & Emmet, 1979), even locally.

Although some districts changed their emphasis from one vegetable to another, and considerable local movement of market-gardens was experienced, the growers kept to the same general areas and the quantitative distribution of commercial lettuce in about 1930 (Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries, 1932) and in 1958 (Coppock, 1964) would not have been dissimilar to that during the late 19th century, with some latterly increase to the southeast of London.

(to be continued)

Notes and Observations

EGIRA CONSPICILLARIS L. (THE SILVER CLOUD): NOTES ON THE FINDING OF EGGS IN THE WILD — I found several eggs batches of this species during May 1985 in a Herefordshire locality where I had obtained the moth in 1984. Eggs were deposited on old dock stems some way up on the plants, and were quite conspicuous. All batches were found along a narrow strip of land bisecting two fields. Nettle, *Rumex* and grasses were all that grew amongst adjacent fences. Two females of ab. *melaleuca* were also found, resting head down on fence posts not far from the two egg batches on May 14th. A further batch was found on 22nd May and two more the next night. Despite intensive searching of this piece of ground, no ovipositing females were seen or any pairings observed.

Some time was spent searching fence posts and old dock stems during the day, in company with B. Skinner and D. Chatelain, but we were unable to locate any other apparent breeding areas. The moth occurs in nearby woodland as well as in open country. Elm, the known larval foodplant is only present as a regenerated hedge along the road, and it seems likely that dock may be the natural foodplant for *conspicillaris* larvae in this district. Larvae from these egg batches were reared alongside offspring from wild-caught females and were supplied only with common elm. — J. PLATTS, 11 Maydowns Road, Whitstable, Kent.

A NOTE ABOUT SCYDMAENUS RUFUS MULL. & KUNZE. (COL.: SCYDMAENIDAE) — In Britain, *Scydmaenus rufus* has traditionally been associated with old trees. Joy (1932, *A Practical Handbook of British Beetles*) gives as its habitat "rotten wood". Donisthorpe (1939, *A Preliminary List of the Coleoptera of Windsor Forest*) recorded it from under oak bark and it was in such a situation that I first encountered it (three examples) at Wisley, Surrey in June 1974 in company with the ant *Lasius brunneus* Latr.

It seems not well appreciated, however, that the beetle is also to be found among dung and other farmyard debris. I found 5 examples in a small volume of sievings from a heap of old manure and rotten hay near Headley, Surrey in January 1985. It was presumably breeding there for, in November, a further few handfuls of sievings produced another 20 specimens. My friend Peter Hammond has told me that, in 1983, he found a number of examples in a manure heap in Richmond Park (where we have both taken it in its traditional habitat). On the continent, it is stated to occur 'in dry dung and compost; also in rotten wood' (Franz and Besuchet, 1970 in *Die Käfer Mitteleuropas* 3 ed. Freude, Harde & Lohse).

I wonder if the breeding of *S. rufus* in farmyard debris is a relatively new phenomenon. In Britain, *S. rufus* has a reputation for being rare. Fowler (1889, *The Coleoptera of the British Isles*) wrote that he knew of only two British specimens and, later, the late Revd. E. J. Pearce (1974, *Entomol. mon. Mag.* 110: 13) recorded that, in his many years of collecting, he had found only one example. The collectors of Fowler's time, and of the generation which followed, were certainly familiar with beetles of farmyard debris. In the days of the horse, there were almost certainly many manure heaps about, which suggests that the beetle used not to occur in this habitat. It would be interesting to know whether there is any evidence of a similar change in habitat preference on the continent. J. A. OWEN, 8 Kingsdown Road, Epsom, Surrey, KT17 3PU.

EDINBURGH'S CLOUDED, DRAB SUMMER. — On 15.viii.1985 I found a fully grown larva of the noctuid moth *Orthosia incerta* (Hufnagel) on a footpath beneath an avenue of trees running across The Meadows, Edinburgh. Lime (*Tilia x europaea*) was overhead, but sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and wych elm (*Ulmus glabra*) were nearby. The caterpillar was alive (though terminally mauled by passing feet) and I could find no evidence of any disease or parasitism that might have delayed its development. Mid August is a remarkably late date for larvae of this species, and it illustrates very well what a flop the early part of the summer of 1985 was, particularly in Scotland.

In fact the late part of the summer was no better, and 24 days on I nearly lost my marbles altogether when I found a queen wasp in hibernation in my chilly greenhouse on 9.ix.1985; only discovering later that it is not unusual for that particular species, *Vespula rufa* (L.), to enter hibernation as early as August. At the time I suffered only a flash of "surely it can't still be waiting for spring 1985 like the rest of us", but it took longer to quell the despair that we were not even going to get autumn this year. Eventually I got it all under control to be merely encouraged to see that social wasps, all of which have been very scarce locally, have managed to produce queens at all in this sunless year! M. R. SHAW, Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF.